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EXCISE

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1. IN CONVERSATION WITH EMBOFF JULY 15 [redacted] GAVE HIS ACCOUNT OF THE ARMED FORCES COUNCIL MEETINGS WHICH LED TO FORMATION OF THIEU-KY PRESIDENTIAL SLATE. HE SAID THAT THROUGHOUT MEETINGS BOTH THIEU AND KY WERE UNCOMPROMISING. THREE OF THE 4 CORPS COMMANDERS (LAM, LOC AND MANH) TOOK A NEUTRAL STANCE APART FROM INSITING THAT EITHER THIEU OR KY, OR BOTH, STEP DOWN FROM RACE. ACCORDING TO [redacted] KY MADE THE DECISION TO WITHDRAW HIS PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDACY WHEN III CORPS COMMANDER KHANG, UPON WHOSE SUPPORT KY RELIED HEAVILY, LET IT BE KNOWN THAT HE DID NOT INTEND TO BACK KY TO THE HILT.

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2. [redacted] OBSERVED THAT AFTER THE COUNCIL MEETING, KY SUPPORTERS, PARTICULARLY GENERAL LOAN WERE VISIBLY SHAKEN. HOWEVER, APART FROM NOTING THE ATMOSPHERE OF GLOOM IN THE KY CAMP, [redacted] THOUGHT IT DIFFICULT TO PREDICT THE EFFECT OF RECENT EVENTS ON THE FUTURE THIEU/KY WORKING RELATIONSHIP. HE DID NOT INDICATE ANY KNOWLEDGE OF AN AGREEMENT BETWEEN THIEU AND KY ON THE DIVISION OF POWER IN THE FUTURE GOVERNMENT. [redacted] MERELY SAID THAT KY CONTINUES TO FEEL DEEPLY WOUNDED BY WHAT HAPPENED TO HIM. HE ALSO SPECULATED THAT KY'S ENTOURAGE MIGHT NOT GIVE ITS WHOLE-HEARTED BACKING TO THIEU'S CAMPAIGN.

3. [redacted] PROFESSED ADMIRATION FOR THIEU AS AN EFFECTIVE AND HONEST OFFICER. HE QUESTIONED, HOWEVER, THIEU'S ABILITY TO WAGE AN EFFECTIVE ELECTION BECAUSE HE IS TOO RESERVED. [redacted] VENTURED THE OPINION THAT THIEU IS NEITHER WELL-KNOWN NOR PARTICULARLY RESPECTED IN THE COUNTRYSIDE.

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DEPARTMENT OF STATE A/CDC/MR
REVIEWED BY Susan Ingalsbe DATE 10/7/81
PORTIONS EXCISED AS NOTED

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4. [redacted] EXPRESSED CONCERN THAT REJECTION OF GENERAL MINH'S CANDIDACY WOULD BE SERIOUS SET-BACK TO CONSTITUTIONAL PROCESS. [redacted] FORESEES POSSIBILITY OF "POPULAR REACTION" IF NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DOES NOT ACCEPT MINH'S CREDENTIALS. AT SAME

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TIME, HOWEVER, [redacted] COMMENTED THAT POSSIBILITY OF DISTURBANCES AND SERIOUS POLITICAL INSTABILITY EVEN GREATER IF MINH'S CANDIDACY ACCEPTED AND THEN DIRECTORATE PERSISTS IN REFUSING MINH PERMISSION TO RETURN. ASKED IF ARMED FORCES COUNCIL RESOLUTION BARRING MINH'S RETURN HAD RECEIVED WHOLEHEARTED ENDORSEMENT OF COUNCIL'S MEMBERSHIP, [redacted] REPLIED THAT JUNIOR MEMBERS OF COUNCIL HAVE VIRTUALLY NO INFLUENCE IN COUNCIL'S DELIBERATIONS. DECISION-MAKING POWER IS CONCENTRATED IN THE HANDS OF THOSE GENERALS WHO ARE ALSO MEMBERS OF THE CIRECTORATE, PARTICULARLY THE CORPS COMMANDERS.

5. COMMENTING ON OTHER PRESIDENTIAL POSSIBILITIES, [redacted] SAID THAT A TICKET HEADED BY TRAN VAN HUONG AND SUPPORTED BY GENERAL MINH PROBABLY HAS THE BEST CHANCE OF RALLYING POPULAR SUPPORT. A NUMBER OF PEOPLE ARGUE THAT IF A CIVILIAN WINS HE WILL NOT BE ABLE TO CONTROL THE ARMY; [redacted] BELIEVES THAT DESPITE INEVITABLE STRAINS AT THE OUTSET, A STRONG, SKILLFUL CIVILIAN PRESIDENT COULD EVENTUALLY WIN EFFECTIVE CONTROL OVER THE ARMED FORCES. "AT THE MOMENT THE ARMED FORCES CONSIDERS ITSELF A FORCE ABOVE THE CONSTITUTION," SAID [redacted] "AND THIS WILL HAVE TO CHANGE."

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6. WITH REGARD TO THE US ROLE IN VIETNAM, PARTICULARLY AS IT AFFECTS LOCAL POLITICS, [redacted] SAID THAT MOST VIETNAMESE UNDERSTAND VERY WELL THAT, DESPITE FREQUENT RUMORS TO THE CONTRARY, WE IN FACT DO NOT SUPPORT OR OPPOSE ANY PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE. [redacted] ADDED THAT WERE IT NOT FOR OUR PRESENCE, THE CONSTITUTIONAL PROCESS WOULD NOT HAVE GOTTEN AS FAR AS IT HAD. LEFT TO THEIR OWN DEVICES, THE MILITARY WOULD HAVE ALREADY COMPLETELY DISREGARDED THE CONSTITUTION AND SOUGHT EVERY ZAY POSSIBLE TO SIMPLY PERPETUATE MILITARY RULE. THE

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-3-Saigon 1177, July 16

ATTITUDE OF A NUMBER OF OFFICERS AT THE ARMED FORCES COUNCIL MEETING IN MARCH (AT WHICH IT WAS DECIDED TO ACCEPT THE CONSTITUTION "IN PRINCIPLE") WAS AMPLE EVIDENCE OF THIS. [redacted] EXPRESSED THE HOPE THAT OUR PRESENCE HERE WOULD HAVE THE CONTINUED EFFECT OF PROMOTING GENUINE CONSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENT.

7. [redacted] CONCLUDED THAT, PERSONALLY, HE LOOKS FORWARD TO THE COMING ELECTIONS WITH ENTHUSIASM AS DO MANY OTHERS IN THE ARMY. HE IS CERTAIN THAT THE ELECTIONS, AND THE WAY IN WHICH THEY ARE CONDUCTED, WILL HAVE A DECISIVE IMPACT ON VIETNAM'S FUTURE ABILITY TO COPE WITH ITS PROBLEMS.

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CORRUPTION AND DETERIORATION OF SOCIAL VALUES ARE THE TWO PROBLEMS WHICH HE CONSIDERS MOST IMPORTANT. THEY CAN ONLY BE TACKLED BY A STRONG, POPULARLY-ELECTED GOVERNMENT.

8. COMMENT:

A. [redacted] REMARKS CAN BE TAKEN AS AN INDICATION THAT KNOWLEDGE OF ANY SPECIFIC AGREEMENT BETWEEN KY AND THIEU OVER DIVISION OF PWER IN THE FUTURE GOVERNMENT IS NOT WIDESPREAD AMONG COUNCIL MEMBERS.

B. [redacted] IS SYMPATHETIC TO THE CANDIDACY OF TRAN VAN HUONG ALTHOUGH THERE IS NO INDICATION THAT HE IS ACTIVELY PROMOTING HIM. HIS REMARKS SHOULD BE READ IN THAT LIGHT.

C. [redacted] ACCOUNT OF THE JUNE 30 MEETING OF THE ARMED FORCES RTUNCIL IS PROBABLY AN ACCURATE THOUGH PERHAPS INCOMPLETE ACCOUNT OF THOSE EVENTS FROM THE POINT OF VIEW OF A JUNIOR MEMBER OF THE COUNCIL. WE HAVE HEARD FROM OTHER SOURCES THAT KHANG'S DEFECTION FORCED KY TO GIVE WAY. ALTHOUGH THIS MAY NOT BE PRECISELY WHAT HAPPENED, IT IS SIGNIFICANT THAT [redacted] AND OTHERS BELIEVE THIS VERSION. GP-1. BUNKER
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